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Premier sees problems in French spy agency

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PARIS — The government yesterday said it had no reason to doubt its special investigator's conclusion that French agents were not involved in the sabotage of a Greenpeace ship, although it acknowledged "important deficiencies" in the intelligence service.

The investigator's report, issued Monday, was ridiculed by much of the French news media yesterday and labeled "unbelievable" by the prime minister of New Zealand, where the attack occurred last month before the ship could sail to protest French nuclear tests.

In his first official response, French Premier Laurent Fabius said he had "no evidence permitting me to contradict" the finding that French agents had not planted the two mines that destroyed the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland on July 10, even though the agents had been sent to New Zealand to spy on and infiltrate Greenpeace, an environmental group.

That finding was in a report by Bernard Tricot, a former government official. The report gave no evidence as to who did carry out the attack, which killed a Greenpeace member.

New Zealand is holding two French agents on murder and arson charges and is seeking three others. Fabius asked New Zealand to forward its evidence to France, and he pledged that France would prosecute if that evidence was convincing.

"The French government is determined that no element remain in the shadows," Fabius said in a six-minute statement he read to reporters.

"The guilty, whoever they might be, must answer for the crime," he

said.

Even while accepting the agents' innocence, however, Fabius said that the Greenpeace affair had revealed problems within the French intelligence service, known as the DGSE, and that he had asked the minister of defense to investigate and correct them.

"Every great nation needs intelligence services," Fabius said. "At the same time, it is necessary that these be the object of controls. The situation in this regard does not seem satisfactory to me."

He did not specify any control violations. Nor did he say how there could be such problems stemming from the Greenpeace affair if — as the government now accepts from Tricot — French agents did not sink the Rainbow Warrior. Fabius left the crowded room in the prime minister's building without answering any questions.

His statement seemed to imply, however, that civilian officials were concerned that DGSE had embarked on such an elaborate surveillance mission, one that included attempts to infiltrate Greenpeace.

In his 29-page report, Tricot, a former adviser to President Charles de Gaulle and named by the Socialist government to examine the case, accepted virtually without question statements by DGSE officials and agents about the mission in New Zealand. They told him that two teams had been dispatched only to obtain information about Greenpeace as it prepared another protest campaign against the nuclear tests in French Polynesia.

Based largely on "their character" and their awareness of the risks to France if they had tried any violence and been caught, he had believed

them, he said.

He offered no independent proof that they had not blown up the ship.

As to who did plan the attack, Tricot suggested a political fanatic or another nation's intelligence service.

Although Greenpeace officials will not comment formally until tomorrow, the Greenpeace office here issued a list of "curious contradictions" it found in Tricot's findings.

It asked, for example, why four of the five DGSE agents present in New Zealand at the time of the attack were skilled frogmen if their mission was only to monitor Greenpeace and perhaps place an agent in the group.

And Greenpeace asked why three of the agents left New Zealand the day before the attack if they were supposed to watch the Rainbow Warrior sail.